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SUBJECT: SECURITY TIGHT AT MASS TRIAL OF DEMONSTRATORS

REF: VILNIUS 222

11. (U) A/Pol/Econ Chief attended the April 16 opening of the trial of ten youth activists accused of participating in the unsanctioned January 21 demonstration for entrepreneurs' rights. Among the defendants is Andrey Kim, who has been in custody since January 31 and is facing additional charges of assaulting a police officer. Four additional defendants were scheduled to be tried, though their hearings have been postponed because they did not have time to review case files. Also observing the trial were the Slovak Head of Mission and representatives from the Czech and French Embassies. The trial continues April 17.

12. (U) The security presence was considerably higher than at recent trials. Over 15 Spetsnaz and twenty policemen were on hand to disperse the unusually large crowd of supporters hoping to attend the trial. Dozens of youth activists waited outside the courtroom holding portraits of the defendants. Prior to A/Pol/Econ Chief's arrival, riot police encircled the court building and dispersed about 70 supporters. Inside the courtroom, several of the defendants wore T-shirts emblazoned with the citation from the Belarusian Constitution that guarantees freedom of expression and assembly. One defendant, Mikhail Krivov, is an alumnus of the USG-funded Muskie Fellowship program and attended San Jose State University in 2006.

Comment

13. (SBU) As reported previously, Kim may become an additional political prisoner and we continue to track his trial closely. It is a positive sign that EU diplomats -- who were not in evidence at the trial in Polotsk of youth activist Yekaterina Solovyova (reftel) and attended the March 25 protest in very small numbers -- have raised their public profile in this case.

MOORE
LEADER